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# GRADUATE PROGRAMS IN EDUCATION:

# IMPACT ON TEACHERS' CAREERS

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This paper examined teachers' decisions to pursue graduate programs and their career choices following completion of their studies. Based on document analysis and statistical examination of teacher questionnaire responses, this study determined that teachers choose graduate studies for different reasons, their program choice influences future career options, the impact varies across programs, and barriers preventing teachers from advancing to leadership positions exist. These findings also show that females are underrepresented in the most senior leadership positions and there are significant gender differences in career goals and program selection. Policy makers need to address issues like the work-life balance, increased workload, gender imbalance, and increased opportunities for aspiring leaders.

## Introduction

Demographic trends in education indicate that vast numbers of administrators are scheduled to retire in the coming decade (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003). Many Western countries predict dire shortages for administrators in K–12 education, and that the reasons for these shortages are complex. By August 2015, approximately 16% of school administrators currently in the Canadian province of Newfoundland and Labrador (principals and assistant principals) will be eligible to retire (Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Education, 2010). As these administrators leave the system there will be a corresponding need for replacements to fill the vacancies. Studies show that similar demographics exist in the United

States and England (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003; Thomson, 2009). While there is ample evidence that teachers are pursuing graduate degrees in increasing numbers (Memorial University, personal communication, January 23, 2013) that does not seem to translate into increased interest in pursuing positions in administration. In order to shed light on this issue, this study examined teachers' careers following the completion of graduate degrees in education and what influences their decisions, and particularly the extent to which these graduate programs lead teachers to take up leadership roles in the school system.

The traditional and still dominant path to school leadership is higher education, and in most provinces and states teachers who complete graduate degrees meet the criteria for positions beyond that of classroom teacher. In Newfoundland and Labrador, as in many other areas, teachers who receive a Master of Education degree advance on the certification scale, receive a salary increase and meet the requirements for administrative positions. In this province 36% of teachers have a Master of Education degree and 47% of those have 15 or more years' teaching experience (Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Education, 2011). Despite the qualifications of teachers, there is anecdotal evidence that they are reluctant to take on leadership positions, especially that of principal and assistant principal. The CEOs and Directors of Education for the province's five school boards report that recruiting for these positions is increasingly challenging with fewer applicants and more of the applicants having less education and experience than five years ago. In the past three years, 18 retired teachers have been hired as principals because no qualified non-retired teacher could be recruited (Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Education, personal communication, 2010).

The purpose of this paper is to present the findings of the study which examined issues related to teachers' decisions to pursue graduate programs and their career options following

completion of these graduate programs. Specifically, the research investigated how teachers' careers are affected through completion of Master of Education programs and to what extent these programs lead graduates to become principals or assistant principals at the school level, or district leaders as either program specialists or administrators.

The research examined what influences teachers' decisions related to leadership positions. It sought to understand what motivates teachers to pursue a Master of Education program, to determine whether or not these graduate studies lead to an interest in administrative positions, and to add to the literature related to supply and demand challenges in educational leadership. Given that the majority of teachers in the field and represented in this study are female, women's perspectives on educational leadership positions and their experiences in a traditionally patriarchal domain are examined.

*Changing Nature of Educational Leadership*

The literature reveals that educational leadership in the beginning of the 21st century is complex, multifaceted and dynamic with career aspirations changing along with the nature of the work (Blackmore, 2002; Thomson, 2009). Despite the apparent demand for educational leaders, teachers pursuing advancement in their careers today are confronted with a different work environment than their predecessors.

A changing educational landscape is affecting those currently in leadership positions and is creating challenges for others tasked with preparing and attracting recruits into the field. Professional issues like the profound changes in the nature of leadership, remunerations, quality of life and gender concerns, the very public pressures that come with intense accountability,

public scrutiny, and the lack of financial and professional rewards make such positions less than desirable (Thomson, 2009).

While the importance of competent leadership has gained recognition, the positions are becoming increasingly unattractive. In recent years there has been a marked shift in the direction of education policy with economic rationalism increasingly being the basis for many of them (Apple, 2002; Burbules & Torres, 2000). Recent trends, locally and globally, are heavily influenced by efficiency and accountability frameworks that exert pressure on people at all levels within educational organizations. District and school leaders are increasingly held to standards and expectations created outside of their organizations through policy mandates and public scrutiny yet often without the resources to respond to the needs. The erosion of local control, mandated reforms, increased accountability, the intensification of work, and loss of autonomy have led to greater stress in the workplace (Apple, 2000; Ball, 1994; Blackmore, 2000; Gerwirtz 2002). Administrators who are tasked with the management of these changes are frustrated with the new roles and the loss of traditional responsibilities of school leadership.

Policy-makers predicted a changing landscape. In the early 1990s the government of Newfoundland and Labrador established a Royal Commission to review the state of education in the province and make recommendations to inform policy (Newfoundland. Royal Commission, 1992). This report foreshadowed significant changes which included:

> . . . chronic and perhaps irreversible changes in our traditional industries, the changing nature of the workplace, the introduction of new technologies, changing population characteristics, changing family structures, increasing strains on economic resources, new expectations, and a heightened awareness of the rights of individuals and groups whose liberties have been constrained in the past. (p. 29)

In the United States, Murphy and Louis (1999) examined the future of educational administration and predicted significant shifts in all aspects of school administration from technical (teaching-learning process), managerial (leadership, administration and organization of schooling), and institutional level (school and external environment). They anticipated that new ways of conceptualizing the nature of knowledge and learning would transform teaching; that dissatisfaction with the current bureaucratic organizational structures would demand creative new models of school leadership; and that a breakdown in the school and external environment would create new dynamics in the relationship between school and community.

The next ten years did bring radical changes in education, especially from an administrative perspective. An unprecedented shift from what was traditionally a locally controlled agenda moved to increasingly centralized decision-making as governments introduced policies intended to increase standards and accountability at all levels. National strategies like the 2002 No Child Left Behind policies in the United States promoted school choice and a standards driven curriculum, and brought an added dimension of stringent and punitive accountability standards which were also consistent with the trends taken in other countries. Such top-down policies created new pressures on administrators at all levels of school organizations. Locally, nationally, and internationally, the roles of administrators in education have undergone drastic changes to become more managerial and political as a result of shifts in policy direction along with societal changes and expectations (Blackmore, 2000; Gerwirtz, 2002).

In the United States the distribution of applicants for school leadership positions is also a concern. There are fewer applicants in high population density, high poverty urban areas. In rural districts, communities with challenging working conditions and high needs are difficult to staff (Cooley & Shen, 2000; Thomson, 2009).

Factors like the changing nature of the work, unrealistic expectations, remuneration, and the effects of the job on family life may have an impact on the decision to enter administrative positions (Thomson, 2009). With these changes in administrative positions, there is some evidence that educators are taking a different view of their careers. Thomson (2009) suggests that educators, like other workers who have adapted to the "new economy," are less likely than those in the past to see education as a lifelong career and much more likely to use their knowledge and skills in making strategic career choices that are in their best interests. Others who acquire the qualifications needed for leadership positions may not choose to advance into available positions. Teachers who aspire to leadership positions are often discouraged by their view of the job of their current administrators. According to Thomson, an obvious gap in addressing the supply problem is related to the lack of attention to the perennial problems related to the intensity of the workload, "the nature of the work and its impact on personal and family life" (p.42). In a study of the shortage of school principals in two states in Australia, Barty Thomson, Blackmore, & Sachs (2005) found that in recent years teachers are strategic in career decisions and evaluate their options and make informed decisions about which positions to apply for based on knowledge of the local context.

A Canadian study which examined the dissatisfaction levels and retirement plans of principals and vice-principals in Ontario found that the factors which contributed to the highest level of dissatisfaction among administrators included those associated with provincially mandated curriculum changes, funding cuts that impacted the school, and policy changes that affected the role of administrators (Williams, 2003). It was noteworthy that results were consistent across gender, age, and level of administration (elementary or secondary) and that salary was not a significant concern in this study.

An examination of the career patterns of senior educational administrators in the public school context in Manitoba found that while administrators enjoy their work and often view it as a vocation, there were cautions to those considering the field (Wallin, 2010). These included the ever increasing responsibility of the position, ongoing threats of litigation combined with little job security, the time commitment and isolation in the position, and being aware of the political realities and pressures in the work environment of senior administrators at the district level. This study also highlighted the importance of maintaining strong core values and beliefs which are being tested in this new environment.

These studies provide evidence that there is consistency among researchers locally, in the Canadian context, and in the broader context (Australia, United Kingdom, United States) regarding the shifts in policy direction that have contributed to the decline in interest in leadership positions in education. These and many other factors have contributed to this change in leadership in education. However, this does not diminish the need for strong school leadership. Researchers involved in school effectiveness and policy direction recognize the importance of on-site leaders in effecting positive change in their organizations and consequently student learning (Barty et al., 2005).

### *Gender and Leadership*

Historically women have been well represented in the field of education and there is evidence that they are increasingly making gains in middle management in school and district positions. However, their representation in senior leadership positions, such as the superintendency, has not met projected expectations (Collard & Reynolds, 2005).

Shakeshaft (1999) conducted an extensive study which examined how women were represented in educational administration historically. Her research also studied ways to increase female representation and create spaces for administrative practices that included gender specific experiences and perspectives. In the United States, Europe, and some developing countries, she found that while women are over represented in the teaching population and fairly represented as elementary principals, there is a noticeable gap in their representation in upper levels of administration. It is at these upper levels where power resides and policy decisions are generated. Historically there has been a consistent trend toward an ever decreasing representation as positions move beyond the classroom, and that has remained fairly consistent over time. The impact of the perspectives and experiences that women bring to administrative roles is yet to be determined, especially in the highest levels of administration.

Shakeshaft (1999) also highlighted barriers to women gaining access to administrative positions including the reluctance of school boards to choose women candidates who are younger or have an early childhood education background. Thomson (2009) also includes lack of opportunity to obtain practical leadership experience and bias in selection and appointment procedures as reasons for the imbalance of females in leadership positions. Younger women are identifying the increased demands of the work and the conflict with home priorities making leadership positions less and less feasible (Collard & Reynolds, 2005). They are more likely to weigh the balance of the impact on personal and family life versus their career and, as compared to men, are more likely to choose one over the other. Time commitments are also increasingly more difficult for women who are torn between professional and personal and family commitments.

Research has also found that women experience conflicts with the current "managerial" focus in leadership and their personal, professional, and ethical values and beliefs about education. They are troubled with the focus on managerial efficiency potentially at the expense of the core values of education which include the focus on teaching and learning (Blackmore, 1999; Gewirtz, 2002; Wallin, 2010).

## Newfoundland and Labrador Context

For the past two decades, student enrolment in the K–12 education system in Newfoundland and Labrador has undergone a significant decline. This decline has caused an ongoing process of consolidation and restructuring. The changes in student enrolments, the number of schools and districts, and the number of teachers are presented in Table 1.

Table 1
*Enrolment and School Data, 1993-1994 to 2010-2011*

| Year | Student Enrolment | Number of Schools | Number of Districts | Number of Teachers |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1993–1994 | 114,158 | 492 | 27 | 7,769 |
| 1999–2000 | 93,957 | 343 | 11 | 6,372 |
| 2004–2005 | 79,439 | 303 | 5 | 5,634 |
| 2010–2011 | 68,729 | 272 | 5 | 5,544 |

Source: Newfoundland Department of Education (1994, 2000, 2005, 2011)

In response to this persistent decline in enrolment, a Ministerial Panel on Educational Delivery was established in 2000 to examine the existing educational models in the province and

provide advice on ways to improve program delivery. The panel heard of the increasing demands and expectations placed on school administrators. Principals indicated that they are the lead in many school district and provincial initiatives in addition to their other educational and managerial roles and are unable to be instructional leaders as their time is consumed with these other duties. Principals believed that the workload and responsibility of their positions has contributed to the province's recruitment challenges (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2000).

In 2004, government consolidated school boards reducing the number from 11 to 5. Corresponding to this reduction was a decrease in the district staff numbers with fewer executive members and program specialists. To put the potential impact of these changes on service delivery in context, Newfoundland and Labrador has a large land mass with a population density of 1.4 per square kilometer. This compares with a population density of 3.7 per square kilometer for Canada (Statistics Canada, 2011).

In Newfoundland and Labrador, there are a range of educational leadership positions. At each school board, the executive consists of one CEO or Director of Education and three Assistant Directors, one of whom is the financial officer; senior education officers oversee families of schools; program specialists, numeracy support teachers, and educational psychologists provide program support to teachers and schools. At the school level, the leadership positions included in this study are those which have a monetary compensation attached to the position and which form the administrative team at the school. These are principals, assistant principals, and department heads.

## Methodology and Data Sources

Given the pressures on principals in Newfoundland and Labrador related to the circumstances described above, this study was undertaken to examine what influenced teachers' decisions to undertake a Master of Education program and whether teachers who complete their program are likely to pursue administrative and other leadership positions.

A quantitative analysis approach was used to seek answers to these research questions. For this analysis, Department of Education documents with information on teacher positions, teacher qualifications, student enrolments, and numbers of schools and districts over time were reviewed. In addition, a researcher-designed, online questionnaire was administered to teachers who work in the public school system in Newfoundland and Labrador, and who graduated from a Master of Education degree program during the period 2002–2006. The questionnaire was administered in March 2011 and asked for demographic and professional information for each of the participants and probed each teacher's rationale for pursuing a Master of Education degree.

Most teachers complete their Master of Education programs at Memorial University of Newfoundland or at Mount Saint Vincent University, Halifax, Nova Scotia. The graduate programs available at Memorial University of Newfoundland include curriculum, teaching, and learning; educational leadership; counselling psychology; information technology; and post-secondary studies. The number of graduates for each program is presented in Table 2.

Table 2
*Memorial University of Newfoundland Master of Education Graduate Data by Program, 2002 to 2006*

| Year | Curriculum, Teaching & Learning | Educational Leadership | Counselling Psychology | Information Technology | Post-Secondary Studies | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2002 | 35 | 28 | 22 | 12 | 12 | 109 |
| 2003 | 29 | 16 | 17 | 23 | 13 | 98 |
| 2004 | 70 | 27 | 25 | 35 | 6 | 163 |
| 2005 | 69 | 50 | 32 | 34 | 12 | 197 |
| 2006 | 59 | 49 | 27 | 26 | 17 | 178 |
| Total | 262 | 170 | 123 | 130 | 60 | 745 |

Mount Saint Vincent University has also been offering a Master of Education program in Literacy Education in Newfoundland and Labrador.

An independent search of the administration records by the Evaluation and Research Division of the Department of Education generated a list of 765 teachers with a Master of Education degree who graduated in the 2002–2006 period. All teachers who met the criteria were contacted through e-mail and invited to participate in the study. There were 132 records removed from the list because the teacher did not meet the criteria or the e-mail address was invalid leaving a sample of 633. The response rate for the questionnaire was 34% (216/633 teachers).

The data from the questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive statistics to describe the various significant relationships such as gender and leadership and program of study and leadership. Some of the questions were open-ended. The responses for these were coded and analyzed according to shared experiences and repetitive themes.

## Results

Results described in this section of the paper are based on the responses of the 216 teachers who responded to the questionnaire (34.1% of the sample) and a review of the Department of Education statistical records such as student enrolments and teacher positions. There are five school districts in Newfoundland and Labrador and respondents from all districts completed the questionnaire; however, no district level analyses are included in this paper. What follows is based on provincial numbers only. Table 3 presents demographic data for the respondents.

Table 3
*Respondent Demographic Data*

| Age | Number of Respondents (% of Total) | Male | Female |
|---|---|---|---|
| 25–35 | 15 (6.9%) | 4 (4.3%) | 11 (9.0%) |
| 36–45 | 115 (53.2%) | 54 (57.4%) | 61 (50.0%) |
| 46–55 | 89 (36.6%) | 34 (36.2%) | 45 (36.9%) |
| 56 + | 7 (3.2%) | 2 (2.1%) | 5 (4.1%) |
| Total | 216 (100%) | 94 (43.1%) | 122 (56.5%) |

The mean teaching time of the respondents is 18.8 years (n=188).

### Profiles of Respondents

Respondents reported a variety of reasons for deciding to complete a Master of Education program. These are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4
*Percentages of Respondents by Reasons for Completing a Master of Education*

| Reasons | Percentage |
|---|---|
| Receive a salary increase | 81.9% |
| Become a better educator | 74.5% |
| Become a leader at school or district | 41.2% |
| Prepare for different school position | 32.4% |
| Prepare for doctoral studies | 10.2% |

As shown in Table 4, many respondents reported that they undertook a Master of Education program to become a better educator. Regardless of the reason for completing a Master of Education program, 88.9% (161/216) of them reported that their Master of Education program has improved their teaching practice through the provision of new knowledge and strategies, and a renewed interest in the teaching profession.

In the questionnaire respondents were also asked questions about the major emphasis of their graduate studies program, the current position, and whether or not they were interested in becoming a leader in education. In response to these questions, 57% (124/216) of the respondents indicated that they completed a Master of Education program with an emphasis in teaching and learning; and 83% (103/124) of these respondents have remained in teaching positions. Seventy percent of the respondents indicated an interest in becoming a leader in education. Most of them reported that they wanted to make a difference and enable change.

Findings from the questionnaire indicate that 27.8% (60/216) of respondents are in a leadership position. Their positions and the major emphasis of their Master of Education program are summarized in Table 5.

Table 5
*Respondents in Leadership Positions by Graduate Studies Program (n = 60)*

| Position | Number (Percentage) | Teaching & Learning | Leadership | Information Technology |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| School Administrator | 47 (78.3%) | 12 | 28 | 7 |
| District Level Program Leader | 13 (21.7%) | 9 | 4 | 0 |
| Total | 60 | 21(35.0%) | 32 (53.3%) | 7 (11.7%) |

Based on a chi-square test, this study found that those who completed a graduate program focusing on educational leadership were more likely to hold a leadership position [$\chi^2(1, N = 216) = 16.72, p=0.000$].

Approximately 64% of the 47 teachers who have moved into a school administrator position indicated that this was the reason they decided to complete a Master of Education program. For the 13 teachers who have become a school district program leader, they had identified a range of leadership goals as the reason for deciding to complete a Master of Education program. These leadership roles include school administrator, school district program leader, and a better teacher.

Almost 67% of the respondents who are not in a leadership role completed the Master of Education in teaching and learning; others reported counselling psychology (13%), informational technology (7%), or leadership (13%) as their major emphasis. Respondents were

asked to give the reasons why they were not in a leadership position. Their responses are summarized in Table 6.

Table 6
*Percentages of Respondents (n=78) by Reasons for Not Being in Leadership Position*

| Reasons | Percentage |
|---|---|
| Family responsibility | 39.7% |
| Lack of available positions | 26.9% |
| Lack of opportunity to gain experience | 21.8% |
| Other | 32.1% |

For this question respondents could select more than one choice, so the total exceeds 100%. As shown in the table, family responsibility was the most frequently selected reason why these 78 respondents were not currently in a leadership position. In the other category, the most common responses were, content with their current position, not the right time in their careers, and issues with the system.

*Significant Gender Differences*

A review of Department of Education's annual reports *Education Statistics* (2001–2011) show changes in gender differences in leadership positions over time. The records for executive members at the school districts and for school principals are presented in Table 7.

Table 7
*Leadership Positions by Gender, 2000–2001 to 2010–2011*

| Year | CEO/Director of Education | | | Assistant Directors | | | Number of Principals | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Males | Females | Total | Males | Females | Total | Males | Females | Total |
| 2000–2001 | 10 (90.1%) | 1 (9.1%) | 11 | 16 (84.2%) | 3 (15.8%) | 19 | 239 (71.1%) | 97 (28.9%) | 336 |
| 2001–2002 | 10 (90.1%) | 1 (9.1%) | 11 | 13 (65.0%) | 7 (35.0%) | 20 | 234 (72.0%) | 91 (28.0%) | 325 |
| 2002–2003 | 10 (90.1%) | 1 (9.1%) | 11 | 14 (70.0%) | 6 (30.0%) | 20 | 226 (71.1%) | 92 (28.9%) | 318 |
| 2003–2004 | 10 (90.1%) | 1 (9.1%) | 11 | 13 (68.4%) | 6 (31.6%) | 19 | 213 (70.8%) | 88 (29.2%) | 301 |
| 2004–2005 | 4* (80%) | 1 (20%) | 5 | 12* (92.3%) | 1 (7.7%) | 13 | 202 (67.1%) | 99 (32.9%) | 301 |
| 2010–2011 | 4 (80%) | 1 (20%) | 5 | 13 (92.9%) | 1 (7.1%) | 14 | 160 (58.8%) | 112 (41.2%) | 272 |

*The male/female breakdowns for 2005–2006, 2006–2007, 2007–2008, 2008–2009, and 2009–2010 are similar to those presented for 2004–2005 and 2010–2011 and so are not repeated.

As indicated in Table 7, male dominance in the executive level positions at the school districts persists with essentially no change in the male–female proportions since school board consolidation in 2004. At the school level, while male principals do outnumber female principals, there is a trend toward a male–female balance. The gender differences in these leadership positions become more apparent when the proportion of female and males educators is considered. For example, in 2010–2011, 29.4% of the educators were male and 70.6% female. This means that 11% of the male educators in the system hold executive positions or are school principals compared with 3% of female educators. In this system, it seems that the outcomes of teachers advancing to leadership positions at the highest level of the organizational hierarchy for both the school level and the school board level favours male teachers.

Other leadership positions have responsibility for supporting students and teachers in the teaching and learning process and in curriculum implementation. In the organizational

structures of schools and school districts, these positions would report to the principals or the executive members. The numbers and percentages for 2010–2011 (Department of Education, 2011) are presented in Table 8.

Table 8
*Other School and School Board Leadership Positions by Gender, 2010–2011*

| Position | Females | Males | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| School District Level | | | |
| Senior Education Officers | 13 (41.9%) | 18 (58.1%) | 31 |
| Program Specialists | 26 (56.5%) | 20 (43.5%) | 46 |
| Sub-totals | 39 (50.6%) | 38 (49.4%) | 77 |
| School Level | | | |
| Assistant Principal | 115.5 (55.8%) | 91.5 (44.2%) | 207 |
| Department Head | 110 (47.7%) | 120.5 (52.3%) | 230.5 |
| Sub-totals | 225.5 (51.5%) | 212 (48.5%) | 437.5 |
| Totals | 264.5 (51.4%) | 250 ((48.6%) | 514.5 |

As shown in Table 8, female representation in these positions is more prevalent with a gender balance across the various roles. Questionnaire results also show significant differences for men and women. These are presented in Table 9.

Table 9
*Gender Differences*

| Characteristic | Male N=94 | Female N=122 |
|---|---|---|
| Reasons for completing Master of Education* | | |
| To become school administrator | 32% | 20% |
| To become a district level program leader | 4% | 16% |
| To become a district administrator | 10% | 3% |
| Current positions*[1] | | |
| Teaching | 54% | 67% |
| Administration (board/school level; see Table 7) | 31% | 15% |
| Principal | 28% | 11% |
| Major emphasis of Master of Education* | | |
| Leadership | 33% | 19% |
| Teaching and Learning | 46% | 66% |
| Information Technology | 16% | 3% |
| University chosen** | | |
| Memorial University of Newfoundland | 79% | 53% |
| Mount Saint Vincent University | 13% | 39% |
| Other | 9% | 9% |

*p<.05, **p<.01

[1] The positions do not add to 100% because some principals are also teachers or may hold positions other than those in the table, e.g., guidance counselor.

Based on the chi-square tests completed, these findings indicate a significant gender difference for (a) reasons for completing a Master of Education program, (b) current positions, (c) major emphasis for the Master of Education, and (d) choice of university for graduate studies.

## Discussion

Leadership positions have become increasingly difficult to fill in schools and in senior positions in school districts despite evidence indicating teachers are pursuing graduate degrees in increasing numbers. While Thomson (2009) found that this generation of educators are less likely to commit to education as a lifelong career and much more likely to use their knowledge and skills in making strategic career choices, this study found that teachers undertake graduate programs for different reasons, primarily to become a better educator and to receive a salary increase. It also found that these goals are realized and that teachers, upon completion of their Master of Education program, have a renewed interest in their profession and have new knowledge and strategies which can be applied to their profession.

For many teachers, the experience of completing graduate studies was a positive one. Through their course work, discussions with their professors and classmates, both during class and outside the classroom environment, and their projects and assignments, many teachers felt more confident in their profession. Thomson's study also found that those who acquire the qualifications needed for leadership positions may not choose to advance into available positions. Similarly, this study also found that fewer teachers begin their Master of Education with the goal of becoming a school administrator or a school district program leader. However, upon completion of their graduate studies, over 70% of the teachers surveyed indicated an interest in becoming a leader in education. The rejuvenation that resulted from their studies may explain why many teachers express an interest in becoming a leader in education even if it was not the reason they began their Master of Education.

To become a principal or district level program leader, any Master of Education program meets the academic requirement. The Newfoundland and Labrador Department of

Education does not require specific training in administration. However, this study found that teachers who completed their Master of Education program in leadership are more likely to move into a leadership position than those who completed graduate studies in other areas. Nonetheless, teachers who completed their graduate studies in teaching and learning or information technology have also moved into leadership positions at both the school and district level.

Many teachers have not moved into leadership positions since completing their graduate studies. Similar to what other researchers have found (Cooley & Shen, 2000; Thomson, 2009), this study found that one of the main reasons for this is family responsibility. Work–life balance is a priority and family and personal commitments prevent many teachers from taking an administrative position.

A number of studies have determined that the role of administrators; the changing nature of the work associated with funding cuts and policy changes at provincial/state and district/region levels; and the required time commitment has changed the perspective of leadership positions and created recruitment challenges (Barty et al., 2005; Thomson, 2009; Williams, 2003; Wallin, 2010). As shown in Table 7, the results of this study provide more evidence that the responsibilities associated with administrative positions are viewed as too demanding and stressful, and require long hours.

Similar to other studies (Thomson, 2009), this research found that the lack of available positions and the lack of opportunity to gain experience prevented teachers from obtaining leadership positions. This appears contrary to the claim that school boards struggle to fill leadership positions. Teachers who live in rural communities are likely to work in a school in their community or in a neighbouring community. They are often unable or unwilling to move to another community or commute the long distances required to take on an administrative position.

This study found that a number of significant gender differences exist. Fewer women are in administrative positions and fewer women do a Master of Education program to take on an administrative leadership role. These findings support the work of other studies which have found that the time commitments, as well as the dichotomy between the managerial focus in leadership and personal and professional beliefs about education, has resulted in fewer women taking on leadership positions in education (Blackmore, 1999; Gewirtz, 2002; Collard & Reynolds, 2005, Shakeshaft, 1999; Wallin, 2010). Those who do wish to assume a leadership role are more likely to want to become a program leader at district level.

Choice of university also differs according to gender. In this study, most males chose an institution which requires some on-campus time whereas more females chose one which has a combination of distance delivery and community outreach making it more accessible to teachers who live in rural communities or have family responsibilities. It seems that females are more likely to pursue studies from an institution which allows them to complete a program within close proximity to their school or home community. This is consistent with Wallin (2010) who recommended that additional resources are needed to provide adequate succession planning and to level the playing field for those without ready access to institutions of higher education.

## Conclusions

This research informs policy and practice through an analysis of the purpose and rationale for pursuing graduate programs from the educators' perspective. It provides further evidence of teachers' motivation for pursuing graduate programs and their careers following the completion of a Master of Education degree. It has shown that teachers pursue graduate studies for different reasons, some to become better teachers and others to move into leadership

positions. We have learned that undertaking a Master of Education degree has a positive impact on teachers and how they view themselves as educators. Upon completion of their program, many regard themselves as capable of becoming educational leaders. This could be an opportunity for school districts to recognize new graduates and provide orientation to leadership roles.

The findings of this study can inform policy direction and its impact on individual career decisions with further implications for leaders and leadership development programs. It has shown that the number of teachers who are earning Master of Education degrees has increased and many of them are interested in leadership roles. These teachers meet the academic requirements for the positions yet many have not pursued any leadership roles. It was found that hiring practices do favour candidates with a Master of Education in leadership. This suggests the need to review policies and practices regarding leadership development and recruitment, and to communicate information on positions, hiring criteria, and opportunities to teachers.

Another area that requires further discussion and research is the impact of family responsibility on decisions to pursue leadership positions. Given that most teachers value their work–life balance and view administrative positions as time demanding and stressful, policies which provide a more manageable position description are required. Until such policies exist, the recruitment challenges are likely to persist. This is particularly critical for females who are more likely to choose family responsibility over career advancement**.** Females are currently under-represented in executive and principal roles; however, there is no gender equity policy in Newfoundland and Labrador.

While many teachers who have completed graduate studies are content with teaching and would rather be teaching and interacting with students than be removed from the classroom

in an administrative position, it would be useful to gain further insights into why many educators who may have an interest in leadership positions remain in classroom teaching positions.

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